

2021 Regional Telecommunications Review

Formal Submission

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I thank everyone involved in the planning and execution of the 2021 Regional Telecommunications Review; I attended the event via Microsoft Teams and was glad to have it as a means of making critical voices heard.

Goomalling, where I reside, is located in the Wheatbelt region of Western Australia, 45 kilometres north-north-east of Northam. While the topic of telecommunications can be considered broad, I will be detailing my personal experiences with internet and broadband services available (or should I say unavailable) to myself as a resident of Goomalling.

In April of 2021 I moved away from my family's farm property located 4km outside of the Town of Goomalling, and relocated into my current residence at 25 Bowen St, Goomalling. While I find living in town thoroughly enjoyable and opportune, the experience I have experienced to date in regards to internet services has been nothing short of abysmal. I signed up to an ADSL service with Telstra for my new home, 25 Bowen St, when I moved in – I am no fan of ADSL services, but it better suited my desires than the alternatives.

What alternatives were/are available for someone in Goomalling? This is where the problem begins as there are very few alternatives available here. At the time of writing this, Goomalling does not have NBN access in the form of a fixed-line connection, we do not have NBN access in the form of in-home wireless, yet we do have very limited access to NBN via satellite services. Asking around town, and perhaps all around Australia, there are mixed opinions to be heard on the quality and reliability of satellite services. With *extremely restrictive data usage limits, painfully unreliable connection assurance and steep prices*, it's no surprise the opinion of this option is so abysmal. Beyond connecting to the NBN, another option is to acquire a broadband service using the mobile networks for your home – this is just as expensive as a satellite connection, if not more so, with relative drawbacks.

Within the first three days at my new home I had already set up my internet service with the supplied Telstra ADSL-enabled modem, and yet it wasn't working correctly and the ADSL service had not come online; the modem defaulted to using the mobile backup network to supply me with an internet connection. This continued into May. And into June. And July. For four months I did not receive the ADSL service that I was paying for; I was

in constant back and forth with my Internet Service Provider (ISP), Telstra, trying to resolve the problem. I was redirected to different departments and spokespeople to “help” me resolve my problem. On two separate occasions were technicians sent to my address to “fix” the problem – the longest one technician was here was for about 35 minutes, and his conclusion was that I had not been assigned an ADSL port. Finally, an answer, I thought – this was in mid-July. The back and forth continued for another month until the 19th of August when my issue was “resolved”, and a critical flaw was revealed. The ISPs, the call centres, the representatives, technicians, workers – everyone working to help me simply do not understand what the situation is like here in the Wheatbelt of Western Australia. They have no grasp on what our options are for connecting to the internet, on what we experience in terms of customer support and understanding how we make use of these services. And how did my situation get “resolved”? Therein lies the dire, unfortunate reality. The technician that said I had not been assigned an ADSL port was correct because there are no ADSL ports available in Goomalling. There hadn’t been available ADSL ports when my service was sold to me and there still are no available ADSL ports right now. How was I sold something that could not be supplied to me? How did it take 5 months to tell me this? 5 months of calling and being led on wild goose chase after wild goose chase only to be told that I can’t have what I paid for and the odds of me getting what I want are unlikely. I don’t have answers for these questions, and I don’t want them. Not anymore.

The situation for Goomalling and the Wheatbelt at large is an unfortunate one. Internet dependence is the way of the modern world and those without readily available access to it fall behind; communities like Goomalling survive with grassroots-initiatives, tourism and locally ran businesses & events. When the eftpos machine won’t work because the connection gets hung up, what do we do? How does the student complete their homework when they can’t research anything at home? How do the impoverished and those in below-average income households afford to have internet access when the only ones available to them cost close to \$100 a month? What incentive does a tourist have to stop in a town with no Wi-Fi hotspots, poor signal strength and exorbitant costs to use their personal roaming data?

Communities in and around the West Australian Wheatbelt are suffering, but not in silence – perhaps that’s the most frustrating thing of all. We express our concerns to the ISPs and have done so time and time again for years now, and yet here we remain.

I will stop here in an effort to not ramble or unnecessarily lengthen this already wordy letter. While there myriad of issues plaguing the Wheatbelt of Western Australia in regards to telecommunication, I hope this recount of my personal experiences proves to be encouraging for the right eyes and enlightening for the wrong ones.

Thank you.